182
643
771
775
776

Nyikang who is the medium between man and God (*Juok*) and is believed in some way to participate in God as he does in the king. 'Nyikang is the *reth* but the *reth* is not Nyikang.'[1] The participation of Nyikang in the king raises the kingship to a plane above all sectional interests, whether local or of descent. All the Shilluk share in the kingship, [185] however their loyalties may pull them apart in other matters, because in Nyikang are centred all those interests which are common to all the people: success in war against foreigners and the fertility and health of men, cattle, crops, and of those wild beasts which are of service to man. Professor Westermann tells us that 'everything they value most in their national and private life, has its orig[illegible] in him'.[2] Mr Howell and Mr Thomson tell us tha[illegible] when a king dies the Shilluk say '*piny bugon*', 'there is no land'[3]—the centre of the Shilluks' world has fallen out. It is restored by the investiture of a new king, for though kings may perish the kingship, that is Nyikang, endures. Mr Oyler tells us: 'They say that if Nikawng should die, the whole Shilluk race would perish.'[4]

[1] Howell and Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 8. [2] *Op. cit.* p. xliii.
[3] Howell and Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 18.
[4] Rev. D. S. Oyler, 'Nikawng and the Shilluk Migration', *S.N. and R.* (1918), p. 115.

13: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1920 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

756 when he is asked to kill a man he may take a sheep, and cleave its head with an axe, and he declares that in the same manner his power has broken the head of the man against whom the charm was worked. They try to impress the people with a sense of the mysterious, and very frequently they have strings stretched in their houses to impress the people who seek their services.

[177] 185 The witch doctors exert a powerful influence over the Shilluks. Their influence is always against innovation, and they seek to hold the old order of things. While a medicine man who is just beginning his practice must be successful to gain the confidence of the people, yet when he once has their confidence he can readily explain away all his failures.

Very few Shilluks will admit that they believe in the power of the medicine man, but in spite of their denials they seek him constantly, and their whole manner of life is influenced by the witch doctor. A few are beginning to question the whole system. Once a gourd of God broke when some warriors were being tested before a fight. The grain that had been in it was spilled on the ground. One man pointed to the grain, and said: "Is that God"? Apparently he was the only one of the party, who connected the noise made by the gourd with the grain that was in the gourd.

So long as the Shilluks are dominated by the medicine men, they will make very slight advancement in their mode of thought and their manner of living.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

about mid-October, and then the large heads of grain are cut off and stacked on tables to dry out before being loaded into baskets and carried off to the village by the women. The stalks are left standing in the fields to be collected when they are needed. For the time being, then, the Shilluk is contented, having plenty to eat and drink. If the harvest has not been too good, he still has enough food for the next six months, and beyond that he refuses to look. Why should he worry about next year when he might be dead by then? His wife, equally thriftless, will load her basket with the golden grain and set off to the nearest merchants, perhaps ten or fifteen miles away, to exchange it for a handful of piastres. She knows full well that before the next rains have even begun she will have to go back to the same merchant to buy back her grain at twice the price she was given for it, or watch her family struggle in semi-starvation for the remainder of the year, but that does not deter her from crossing the road from the grain store to the general store run by the same merchant and squandering her money on a few strings of beads, a few feet of copper wire, a small mirror or such other trifles.

In the new year, when the swamps and khors are draining back to the Nile and the tall grass is drying and yellowing under the fierce heat of the sun, it is time to think of re-building and re-thatching. A well-made house will stand the rigours of perhaps ten rainy seasons; a good thatched roof for two or three. After the roof has been renewed three times, the cracking and crumbling walls are beyond further patching up, and the house must be pulled down and rebuilt. Building is a community affair, and the builders are paid for their labour in beer, the brewing of large quantities of which is an essential preparation for the work.

If a new hut is to be built, a circle of about twelve feet in diameter is marked out on the ground and a shallow trench dug round the circumference. Stakes are driven into this every six inches, so that they stand four feet above the ground, and these are bound together by coarsely plaited grass ropes woven around and in and out from bottom to top.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

advantage of the superiority that the mission education gave them over their fellows, for one became a doctor; not, alas! one of the medical variety, but a witch doctor, and the other, rejoicing in his knowledge of writing and arithmetic, tried to forge a paysheet, and now languishes in Malakal Gaol.

To the Shilluk, the foreigner and all his works were of little or no interest, unless he could see some immediate personal benefit to himself. The missionary was a person whom he hoped to touch for a piastre or a pipeful of tobacco; the mission was a place where those good, but queer, women, the Sisters ('*Thwore*'—an attempt at the Italian '*Suore*'—as he called them), could be relied upon to produce a remedy for his tummyache, a bandage for his sores and a soothing medicine for his rheumy eyes. So, too, education meant nothing to him. The mission school did not mean a place where his children could learn to read and write, but rather a convenient nursery and boarding house where offspring could be dumped during the periods when food was short in the village, and in the rainy season when parents were busy about the all-important business of planting and were only too glad to have their infants out of the way and from under their feet. They knew that in the mission the child would be well fed and housed, would even be given a yard or so of white cloth to wear and a blanket in which to roll himself at night. And when the rains were over and the grain baskets once more full, he could promptly be recalled to the family hearth, to attend to the domestic chores of minding the baby or tending the herd of goats and sheep.

The boys, too, who did condescend to attend the school, were for the most part not particularly worried about their academic advancement. They came because it was a novelty for them; it was a change from the life of the cattle camp and the village; from the milking of cows and the herding of goats and the nursing of squalling babies. They came also because of the amenities the status of a scholar offered to them; the resplendent white cloth with which to cover their

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

in the school, knowing that re-entrance was barred to them if they ran away, and sensing what the coldness of their reception at the family dinner table would be if they returned at such a time, elected to stay, and found that actually gozintas and all that could be fun. They remained for that year and came back for more the following year. Numbers grew year by year until the happy day in mid-January 1946 when I had to turn applicants away through lack of room.

At the time of writing the Shilluk have become far more education-conscious, and all our schools can now be filled without any difficulty. Indeed the problem has now become that of finding sufficient room and teachers for all who apply. Even girls are coming forward in increasing numbers. The reader may have noticed that so far there has been mention only of boys. In 1940, girl education was but an idle dream. Now each mission has its separate girls' school in the care of the Sisters, and so the prospects for the future Christianizing of the Shilluk are thereby considerably enhanced.